History of Indigenous Australians and Census

The following historical extracts are from Western Australia. They give snap shots of the changing attitudes of the Australian Government towards Indigenous Australians.

'Enumerated' means 'counted'.

1919	THE ABORIGINES.—As in all countries where the white man has settled among races that cannot in a large measure adapt themselves to his forms of civilisation, the natives, in so far as they existed in the present centres of settlement, are fast dying out, a natural consequence of the loss of their original hunting-grounds. They are of quick intelligence, but disinclined for the application made imperative by the civilised modes of life. The Government has taken the best measures available for their protection.
1946	THE NATIVES.—The earlier decline in the native population has been arrested, and their numbers have been stationary between 20,000 and 22,000 for some years now, due to increased medical attention and protective legislation. Approximately 10,000 natives are beyond the confines of civilisation, and the mode of life of the remainder varies from full tribal life to complete detribalization. The natives, except those out of touch with white settlement, are mostly employed in rural and pastoral pursuits. They are intelligent and display ready adaptability to pastoral work. The social circumstances of detribalized natives are on an upward trend, and detribalized native parents are showing an increasing realisation of the value of education for their children
1950	THE NATIVES.—At the 30th June, 1949, the native population numbered 23,000, comprising 11,000 full bloods and 6,000 caste people living within the confines of civilisation, and some 6,000 beyond. The full blood population is slowly declining, while the caste people are increasing. Natives have proved to be capable pastoral and agricultural workers and some of the more intelligent are entering industrial employment. The social status of the natives is receiving close attention. While the full bloods living in their tribal state are not being disturbed, the detribalised natives, particularly the caste people, are being encouraged to improve their living conditions. By their education at missions and other establishments, the native children are being trained to become ultimately responsible citizens. It is hoped that they will thus be fully assimilated into the life of the State.

1962	**The Natives**—At the 30th June, 1961 there were approximately 10,000 full-blood aboriginal natives in Western Australia, 8,000 living within the confines of civilization and 2,000 beyond. The conditions and welfare of natives in Western Australia are the responsibility of the Commissioner of Native Welfare. For administrative purposes the State is divided into six major districts, each in the charge of a Welfare Officer and, in addition, there are three mobile welfare clinics. The aim is for full assimilation of aboriginals into the life of the community. Native children are admitted to both government and non-government schools and are educated under the same conditions as other children. Aboriginals other than nomadic or primitive receive attention at ordinary public hospitals and are eligible for all social service benefits on much the same basis as the rest of the population.
1967	**Aboriginal Population**—In accordance with the requirements of the Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Act (as provided by section 127, now repealed in terms of the Constitution Alteration (Aboriginals) Act of 1967), full-blood Aborigines (and dwellings occupied solely by them) are excluded from the figures shown in the tables on pages 32–60. For Census purposes, a full-blood Aboriginal is defined as a person who describes himself as having more than one-half aboriginal blood. The number enumerated in Western Australia at the 1966 Census was 11,542.

Pocket Year Book of Western Australia 1919, 1946, 1950, 1962, 1967

Questions

1. Identify the reasons the Western Australian Government gives for the population decline of Indigenous Australians in the early 1900's.
2. List any other reasons you can think of for the population decline, that were not given by the Government.
3. What conditions changed in between 1919 and 1946 to slow the population decline of Indigenous Australians?
4. In 1950, the Western Australian Government had extensive measures in place to assimilate Indigenous Australians.
   a. What does 'assimilation' mean?
   b. What are the consequences of assimilation?
5. In 1961, the Western Australian Government was allowing access to hospitals and other social service benefits to everyone except Indigenous Australians living a traditional or nomadic lifestyle.
   a. Give suggestions of what the Government intended to achieve through excluding some people from access to these services?
   b. What did this mean for Indigenous Australians living a traditional or nomadic lifestyle?
6. In 1967, Commonwealth laws changed, which resulted in some Indigenous Australians being included in Census. According to the Government, figures collected by that Census showed that the Indigenous Australian population continued to decline. Was this a correct assumption? Explain your answer.
7. In 1971, all Australians were counted in Census together. Describe the impacts this had on the Indigenous Australian community.